

## **PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE METHOD OF ELECTING CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS**

This proposal is to propose how City Council members are elected. My proposal is the have all members elected from 13 separate single member districts.

Beginning in 1967, there were seven single member districts and 6 members elected from at-large positions, citywide. About 12 years ago, the Council voted to change the At-large positions to two "Super Districts," District 8 and District 9 with three positions each. District 8 was set up as predominantly African-American and District 9 as predominantly European American.

The referendum that adopted the "Super Districts" passed but by a narrow margin despite no organized efforts to oppose it.

Whether a candidate runs for an At-Large or a "Super District" position, it requires a lot of money and/or a lot of prior name recognition to get elected to these seats with a constituency of over 300,000 residents. Once a member is elected to one of these seats, it's almost impossible to unseat the member, no matter how lacking their representation may be. Also, this leaves the remaining seven single member districts with large 90,000 resident Districts covering several communities.

The arguments for these types of seats in the past have been that voters got to vote for 7 (with At-Large) or 4 (with "Super Districts") of their council members. However, a large majority of Memphians cannot name their At-large or now their Super District representatives.

The other argument was that these members have a broader view of the City as a whole. However, they have not produced any better quality than single member districts and worse in some cases.

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Therefore, I propose that the City Charter be amended to allow for 13 single member districts, eliminating all Super-Districts and that there be an effort to retain community integrity for each district as much as possible.

Reasons include:

- 1) To strengthen communities. A single member district would typically encompass one community or two or three neighborhoods in Memphis, making its council member the designated and clear-cut representative for that community or neighborhoods. Based on current census figures, this would include around 48,000 to 49,000 constituents. There may also be residual effects that help constituents identify with their communities in a stronger way, creating more community pride.
- 2) Campaign costs. Campaign costs have risen exponentially over the past two decades. Single member districts will eliminate much of that, making candidates less dependent upon special interest money and making middle class citizens who are public minded able to make a credible run for office.
- 3) More Accountable Council Members. With a constituency of less than 50,000 residents, a single member Council member is more identified and more accessible to a community. Residents would know who to contact for City issues. If it was perceived that a council Member was not doing his or her job, it would not require large sums of money or a well known name to mount a credible campaign at election time to change representation.
- 4) Race. Having 13 single member districts will make the racial makeup of the Council more reflective of the City's overall racial makeup. Also, as racial figures change, districts may have a more orderly change.

Submitted by  
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June 26, 2007